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"Making-Face, Making-Heart":
The Spiritual Foundations of an Indigenous Pedagogy

Ralph Casas
Cerritos College

In the United States the public school system is extolled as the "great equalizer," the institution where those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds can attain educational parity with the prosperous and privileged. In the process, poor and disadvantaged persons who study hard and abide by all the rules can acquire valuable "critical thinking" skills, become "life-long learners," and discover the pathway to financial security and individual freedom.

Unfortunately, this myth is not yet a reality for the many so-called "minorities" living in the United States; in particular for those whose ethnic background is mestizo/a. Historically, the Western way of life and system of education, secular and religious, has marginalized mestizos/as. As a people, we have been objectified, humiliated, stripped of language, culture, and religion, raped, conquered, subjugated, colonized, and named. Still, we endure. The 2000 census reveals that Mexican immigrants and others of Latino/a descent comprise greater than 50 percent of the population of Los Angeles County. By the year 2010 it is projected that the non-Anglo school-age population in California will be 60 percent, rising to 70 percent by the year 2030, with Latinos comprising 35 percent and 44 percent of these totals, respectively. Yet, even while growing in stature, the mestizo/a community, specifically the Chicano/a community, continues to be the youngest, most economically deprived, under-educated, and politically disenfranchised population in the United States. Educationally, the risk factors and indices of vulnerability for failure in the public school system continue to be highest for Chicanos/as.


Seeking answers to the so-called "Hispanic" problem, government experts and community consultants impose a homogenous "Hispanic" identity on persons of Central American, South American, Mexican American, and Caribbean descent. The reality is that North American Latinos/as are made up of many diverse groups, each with their own unique cultural identity and unique social and political issues. We are not a homogenous community in the traditional sense; rather, we are a community made up of many diverse communities and subcultures, each with their own unique name and way of being. For this reason, issues of poverty, underachievement in education, and apathy must be confronted at their source. Solutions to local issues will be effective only when they arise from the people.

A Grounded Pedagogy

This paper will consider the obstacles of educating faith, values, and principles from the perspective of generations of immigrants living in Southern California, specifically immigrants from Mexico. I suggest that a successful pedagogy is one that utilizes the resources derived from the local community. The goal is to develop an indigenous ecology of education capable of fashioning a holistic, multiple, or many identity. The task is to develop a curriculum compatible with the epistemological framework and cognitive learning styles of Latino/a immigrants and their children. Pedagogy grounded in indigenous epistemology—one that respects the social construct of reality and cognitive framework of the learner—is superior because it informs and upholds the core identity of the learner and improves the ease with which he or she moves into and out of dominant and subaltern cultures. On a practical level, utilizing the cognitive framework of the immigrant or Chicano/a learner shapes a reality whereby all education is infused with religious meaning and can be construed as religious education.3

Valencia (London: Falmer Press, 1991). The net effect for the young mestizo/a learner is an alienating context. At the local level these contexts include: the local community with its racial, ethnic, and economic stratifications; the school district in general; the local school administration; classroom activities and personal interactions within classrooms; and the pedagogical practices of educators. See Antonia Darder, Rodolfo D. Torres, Henry Gutiérrez, eds., Latinos and Education: A Critical Reader (New York: Routledge, 1997).

3For purposes of this project, religious education is defined as the process of sharing or gaining the particulars of the community story and truth. This involves the formation of community values, attitudes, and lifestyles, and fostering the conversion of people, communities, societies, and structures.
The pedagogical practices and philosophy of the Nahuatl speaking people of ancient Mesoamerica, specifically the Mexica, are evaluated as one model of holistic education capable of informing this vision. Despite the fact that thousands of indigenous societies constituted the nation of Mexico prior to the European conquest, the most extensive, if not the dominant, philosophy was that of the Nahuatl speaking groups whose offspring extended from northern Mexico to Central America. The Mexica were the last of the Nahuatl-speaking tribes to migrate from the north and enter, and subsequently dominate, central Mexico and portions of Central America. It was their philosophical categories and interpretation of the cosmos that had the greatest influence on the philosophical constructs and laws of the post-conquest world of Mexico. Therefore, it is their interpretation of reality and their theological anthropology that I will explore in an attempt to identify key elements of indigenous pedagogy.

People-Making: Cultivating a Core Identity

Persons from culturally conditioned ethnic or racial groups are burdened with the task of appropriating a public and private space wherein they can begin the process of fashioning a core identity. This process begins with the construction of identity in a private world. Only after a secure space is acquired and a core identity is fashioned is it possible to learn to communicate in public with a socially intelligible voice. Thus, construction of a core identity is followed by the traumatic reconstruction of a different identity in the public arena. In the midst of this alienating context the mestizo/a learner struggles to maintain solidarities, boundaries, space, and group membership. The end result of this process can be deleterious to the young child. When unresolved, it contributes to the collapse of identity and the increased likelihood of ethno-stress, an imposed, missing, or incomplete identity formation that is frequently a source of cultural and social marginalization.5

In southern California, the cultural lens with which immigrants and their Chicano/a offspring perceive the world reflects an indigenous worldview. As members of a subculture with connections to an ancient way of life, Latinos/as struggle to maintain an identity in the face of an

4 For an interesting comparison between laws of the Mexica and present day Mexican laws, see Carlos H. Alba, Estudio Comparado entre el Derecho Azteca y el Derecho Positivo Mexicano (Mexico City: instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1949).

5 Gregory Cajete, Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education (Durango, Colo.: Kivaki Press, 1994) 187. Psychological captivity—self-hate and disrespect for one's culture—is a direct result of ethno-stress. Cajete argues that all education must return to its original indigenous orientation.
onslaught of forces demanding a singular American identity. With our core identity cultivated at home in our community, we encounter unfamiliar territory when we venture across boundaries into the larger community represented by dominant American culture. Here, in order to successfully maneuver between disparate worlds, we must discover ways of relating to dominant society using words—signs and symbols—that enable us to interact with others in socially meaningful ways. This process requires that we utilize multiple lenses to interpret our daily reality. Often, learning to use multiple lenses requires the traumatic reconstruction of a new identity, a new self. This process assumes greater significance where there exist fundamental dissimilarities in the way reality is socially created. Descendants of a residually oral, collective society, we create meaning-making systems using a cognitive framework similar to that of our ancestors; hence, we perceive and respond to the world in unique ways. Ultimately, the landscape upon which we paint our dreams of this world is fashioned after the standards given us by our indigenous, Spanish, and African ancestors. This blend of social constructs, the culmination of generations of historical and anthropological influences, creates a unique, albeit divergent, way of perceiving the physical and the spiritual worlds. Forced to travel in and out of multiple worlds, we venture back-and-forth across boundaries, forging a unique identity, a combination of the powerful majority and the dissimilar minority.

All the while, differences in perception and worldview render the school system irrelevant and uncomfortable. The inherent power differential that separates the Chicano/a learner from popular American culture, combined with the dissimilar social construction of reality, places us in a dubious position. From this position, we are compelled to surrender to one of the following methods of survival: succumb to the temptation of popular culture and become assimilated; successfully maneuver between multiple worlds and form a multiple identity; or lose the ability to form what the dominant culture defines as a healthy identity and become socially challenged. Creation and use of an indigenous paradigm of education will allow the fashioning of a holistic, multiple, or many identity.

The Local Community: An Ethogenic Study and Semiotic Analysis

As a basis for analysis of the local community of Chicanos as in southern California, I conducted an ethogenic investigation utilizing a

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contextual praxis-oriented methodology. This methodology allowed me to delve into the everyday reality of Latinos/as living in the southern California region as they navigate the modern day violent and unequal encounter of cultures. The entire process integrated Mary Elizabeth Moore’s ethogenic methods with the major precepts of a dialogical methodology as developed by Paulo Freire and contextualized by Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz.7 Interviews, dialogues, and observations of the community provided the data for the investigation. Interactions occurred between September 1995 and February 2001, in the North Orange County city of La Habra and the Southeastern Los Angeles County cities of Cerritos, Norwalk, Artesia, Paramount, Santa Fe Springs, Pico Rivera, Bellflower, and Whittier. Prior to the interviews the community was divided into the following general categories: students, youth and adult; educators, high school and college; immigrants, citizens and noncitizens; citizens, long-term and short-term; and community activists.

The next step, analysis and interpretation of the cultural data, was accomplished utilizing a semiotic analysis of culture as described by Umberto Eco, Robert Schreiter, and Enrique Dussel, and concretized by Alejandro García-Rivera in his work with descriptive semiotics.8 García-Rivera’s description of semiotics and his emphasis on a semiotic reading of culture allowed the analysis and interpretation, from a symbolic perspective, of the various cultural dimensions of the local community. Together, the data and its analysis provide a glimpse of the reality experienced by mestizos/as and other groups of Latinos/as in the southern California communities surveyed.

In general, persons responded in ways that placed them into one of two groups: the recent immigrant or the descendant of immigrants. No significant contrasts were discerned amongst responses given by immigrants from different Latin American countries. Notably, only


community activists, regardless of the number of generations removed from their immigrant ancestors, gave responses similar to recent immigrants. The generative themes that emerged from this analysis reveal that the mestizo/a American, Latino/a community, in the areas surveyed, constitutes a diverse community of communities. Following are the generative themes and messages: they are sorted by respondent's categories.

**Amongst All Groups:**
- Understanding one's community and culture as unique.
- Many cultural and multilingual patterns of communication.
- An emphasis on survival.
- A deep spiritual connection with persons and places.

**Recent Immigrants** (and Many Nonimmigrant Activists):
- A capacity to critique the community that manifests itself in activism.
- Little or no concern for self-image (also found amongst community activists).
- A focus on community, personal, and family survival.

**Second and Third Generation Descendants:**
- Cultural uniqueness experienced as a cultural bi-location.
- A self-image that is influenced by multiple factors from within and without the community.
- A desire to maintain fixed patterns of interaction.
- Less emphasis on community and family survival.

From this analysis emerged the roots of the local community of Latinos/as, roots that suggest this is a community whose worldview differs from the worldview of dominant American culture. I propose that it is a community that socially constructs its reality utilizing elements of an indigenous framework. This analysis helps explain why indigenous methods of education are needed to equip young learners with the skills necessary to operate in the alien world represented by the North American system of education. The next section provides further support for this argument.

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9 The discerned themes that contrasted with mainstream society were (1) a residual orality, which explains the use of multiple ways of communicating; (2) a bi-location, or a sense of separation between public and private life; (3) a reliance upon folk religiosity and folk wisdom; (4) a devotion to family and community; and (5) a strong sense of place that influences patterns of migration and immigration.
Education and Cultural Annihilation

In many Los Angeles County schools, as part of the process for evaluating and determining whether they should be placed in a remedial program, elementary school-aged children at ten years of age are asked a series of questions testing their auditory perceptual skills. The questions are asked in either in English or Spanish, or both, depending on the child's comfort level with English or their level of English awareness. Although no statistics are available, the majority of children answer in ways that indicate that their cognitive patterns of thinking are derived from an oral or residually oral culture. For instance, when asked why balloons float, they answer, "because they are round." Other questions and answers include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What propels a sailboat?</td>
<td>the water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What causes the night?</td>
<td>the dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What steers a train?</td>
<td>the tracks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What causes ice to melt?</td>
<td>the sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes a ball roll?</td>
<td>because you roll it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What part of the car gives it power?</td>
<td>the gas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What pumps the blood?</td>
<td>the veins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do clouds move?</td>
<td>the wind moves them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What keeps a dog warm?</td>
<td>the sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What happens when you cut with a knife?</td>
<td>it cuts food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What lights a bulb?</td>
<td>the switch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a series of questions, patterns emerge. It appears that the children's responses are derived from a unique culturally conditioned framework, one that contains vestiges of an oral heritage; hence, they can be considered residually oral. In oral or residually oral cultures,

\[\text{Question:} \quad \text{Answer:} \]

\[\text{What propels a sailboat?} \quad \text{the water} \]
\[\text{What causes the night?} \quad \text{the dark} \]
\[\text{What steers a train?} \quad \text{the tracks} \]
\[\text{What causes ice to melt?} \quad \text{the sun} \]
\[\text{What makes a ball roll?} \quad \text{because you roll it} \]
\[\text{What part of the car gives it power?} \quad \text{the gas} \]
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\[\text{Why do clouds move?} \quad \text{the wind moves them} \]
\[\text{What keeps a dog warm?} \quad \text{the sun} \]
\[\text{What happens when you cut with a knife?} \quad \text{it cuts food} \]
\[\text{What lights a bulb?} \quad \text{the switch} \]

10 See Walter Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (London: Routledge, 1982) ch. 3, "Some Psychodynamics of Orality." Ong identifies literate cultures where persons utilize an alphabet to read and write, and primal cultures where persons do not utilize an acknowledged alphabet or utilize a pictographic means of communicating.

11 Ralph E. Casas, personal communication, Whittier, California. These interviews were conducted over a period of five years. For an extensive overview of the role of language in the formation of cognitive structures, see Edward G. Gray and Norman Fiering, eds. The Language Encounter in the Americas, 1492–1800, European and Global Interaction, vol. 1 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

12 These results are consistent with previous findings that demonstrate the ways in which cognitive skills are constructed and shaped in the context of experience.
causal relationships are justified by their relationship to the self and the
local environment; for instance, the function of tools is described by
their usefulness. There is an emphasis on function rather than abstraction;
facts and ideas, therefore, are connected to everyday activity. Answers
to questions are given with respect to the practical use of an object. Ob-
jects are compared to like objects; events occur by happenstance. In
summary, "human events take on meaning only to the extent that they
can be located within a storied universe that continually retells itself."13

Bambi B. Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs point out that cognitive skills
originate in interaction in sociocultural contexts. Language and culture
are acquired together in the same interactive process.14 In addition to
language, people derive values and moral precepts as a result of uniquely
conditioned cultural frameworks. These values serve as guides for
proper patterns of relationships and behavior in private and with the
broader world. The inevitable clash of frameworks, values, and societal
expectations that occurs upon entering the mainstream world—a pro-
cess which usually takes place between the ages of five and ten—places
the young Chicano/a child in a precarious position. With an incom-
plete identity and inadequate coping mechanisms, these young chil-
dren are forced into a culture whose epistemic constructs are often
diametrically opposed to their own. Furthermore, by submitting to an
educational process with epistemological assumptions foreign to those
of their primary culture, research indicates that as these children ma-
ture, they experience cultural genocide in the form of a loss of personal
and cultural identity.15

and through social interaction. See Katherine Nelson, Language in Cognitive Develop-
ment: The Emergence of the Mediated Mind (New York: Cambridge University Press,
1996).

13 David Abram, The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-
Than-Human World (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996) 187. The telling of stories and
transmitting of one's history allows one to actively participate in a creative process
that occurs in the present. Here, history becomes an active, creative process: "an
ongoing emergence whose periodic renewal actually requires such participation"
(Abram, 186). Abram elaborates Ong's theories in the direction of an environmental
ethic; he demonstrates how human communication is a type of birdsong, a form of
resonance with the world. This is indicative of the way in which oral communica-
tion is, in fact, a function of humanity's relationship to the earth. In Abram's anal-
ysis, prior to the development of writing, the birds gave us our identity and the
winds offered up praises to our creator. It is Abram's contention that humans have
lost this inextricable link with the cosmos.

14 Bambi B. Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs, "Language Socialization," Annual

15 See Suzanne Oboler, Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of
(Re)Presentation in the United States (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
1995); and Cajete, Look to the Mountain, 187.
The cultural genocide young Chicano/a learners endure is one consequence of the American preference for assimilation as a prerequisite to full participation in the social and political life of the country. Advocates of assimilation envision the social order from the top down and discount the social realities experienced by the immigrant mestizo/a or their native-born descendants.\(^\text{16}\) Assimilation demands, in the interest of individual autonomy and freedom, loss of so-called "minority" subcultures and the acceptance of an uncompromising American identity. As a means of acceptance, a singular American identity has as its goal the obliteration of difference. Homogeneity is assumed to be the basis for successful integration into society and the precondition for granting the rights of full citizenship.\(^\text{17}\) To this way of thinking, a diverse national population is not in the best interest of the country; instead, all persons are expected to deny the cultural characteristics that make-up their private way of life.\(^\text{18}\)

For Chicanos/as, assimilating is no guarantee of future success. In one sense, assimilation never completely occurs; outward signs of assimilation simply reveal a psychological means of ego survival: an attempt to secure acceptance by imitating a foreign culture.\(^\text{19}\) What may resemble a successful process of assimilation actually results in ethno-stress, an imposed, missing or incomplete identity formation that is frequently a source of cultural and social marginalization. Ethno-stress and marginalization are the most common consequences of denying or failing to resolve the many complex moral, psychological and philosophical differences people encounter when traversing between the


\(^{18}\) Furthermore, "homogeneity is assumed to be the basis for political stability and economic growth," Blanca G. Silvestrini, "The World We Enter When Claiming Rights: Latinos and Their Quest for Culture," *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, ed. William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997) 46. The erroneous assumption made by proponents of assimilation is that whereas negative values and behaviors seen in persons who are two or three generations removed from the first generation immigrant are a result of clinging to the traditions and customs of the motherland, positive, socially acceptable changes in values and behaviors result from the desire of those people to discard their past and become like Anglos.

dominant and nondominant cultures. Realistically, successful Latino/as choose to be organically acculturated rather than assimilated; that is, they construct a resilient multiple identity and move back and forth "from cultural citizenship to legal citizenship and from one identity to the other."^20 In so doing they maintain simultaneously their ethnic heritage and "find a middle way wherein American culture may be added to, rather than substituted for, their own heritage."^21 Those who are successful in completing this positive response pattern do so surreptitiously, out of sight and unseen by dominant society. Those who are unable to make this transition are labeled cultural misfits and permanently relegated to the periphery. It is this segment of society that requires special consideration from educators. Rather than labeling them failures and relegating them to the permanent underclass, it is the duty of the educator to construct pedagogies and methodologies that will involve all learners in the education process.

The task at hand for mestizo/a American educators—who are expected to be academically and functionally efficient in the two cultures they hope to bridge—is to identify, respond to, and ameliorate ethno-stress and marginalization prior to their inception. This is best achieved by helping students form a resilient multiple identity that provides the tools necessary to ease the transition from one culture to another. For the young Latino/a living in the United States the preferred goal of identity formation is the construction of a "multiple identity"—the maintenance of one's primary cultural identity in conjunction with knowledge of and ability to function in the dominant culture. All pedagogy, religious or secular, must recognize the unique aspects of the subaltern cultures in its midst if it hopes to impact society.

**Toward an Indigenous Epistemology**

In immigrant communities, the lines between ancient folklore and contemporary customs frequently blur. Numerous traditions, beliefs, stories, and dichos are encountered that parallel or approximate stories found in ancient Mesoamerica. Francis Kartunnen, renowned authority on the Nahuatl languages, reports incidents from villages in Mexico where advice and sayings are still passed on in formal rhetorical, poetic discourses similar to those found in pre-conquest Mexico.^22 In these

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^20^ Silvestrini, "The World We Enter," 46.
communities, styles of communication and methods of educating developed centuries ago still survive. Recent immigration patterns suggest that a number of people from these villages now live in the United States and have formed their own communities. Persons who live in these communities, even those whose entire lives are spent in the United States and whose primary language is English, are enculturated from birth to interpret and respond to the world from the epistemological framework of their family’s country of origin. Of the many factors influencing the construction of their core identity—the factors that must be considered in fashioning pedagogy more specific to their community—the most significant are derived from indigenous roots. These roots and the cultural lens with which these roots equip the community to interpret reality serve as a basis for navigating the world.

By lifting up and reclaiming an indigenous identity, Chicano/a will be empowered to effect changes in their world. The goal is the unveiling of an epistemology, and subsequently a methodology, more specific to the indigenous framework. Whereas the realidad of mestizaje is one with which I agree in principle, I choose for the moment to dispense with the element of mestizaje that attempts a synthesis of the European with the indigenous. Not only can the search for a universal identity destroy the particularity out of which the Chicano/a operates, unintentionally or not, a teología meztiza de la liberación, dependent on European philosophical categories, can be construed as a denial of an indigenous paradigm of reality. The legitimacy of the ancient epistemic constructs will not be accepted by mainstream academia unless we, the indigenous descendants of the Nahuatl-speaking people of ancient Mesoamerica, first reconstruct and subsequently affirm them. If we continue to do theology in ways that parallel established European methods, we are tacitly accepting as correct not the epistemological, methodological, and ideological assumptions transmitted to us by our ancestors and practiced today in our communities by our people, “but those of the dominant, hegemonic groups in American society.”23 These groups are those whose ideologies created the modernist and postmodernist philosophies at the source of our community’s continued marginalization and suffering. Thus, it is imperative that we articulate a constructive indigenous epistemology and formulate from it a corresponding methodology. In searching for the indigenous roots that contribute to this framework, I will limit myself to a search for the indigenous roots of a Mexican American and Chicano/a epistemology.

Mexica Education: The Roots

The mature man
is a heart solid as a rock,
is a wise face.
Possessor of a face, possessor of a heart,
he is able and understanding.24

In the pre-conquest world of the Mexica, the purpose of education was to form complete persons who practiced rigorous discipline, who were well versed in the community narrative, and who understood their proper relationship to the cosmos and to the community. Each person was formed with the intention of being placed into a specific domain with a role in the life of the community. Ultimately, each person, while dependent upon the whims of the gods and the demands of the state, controlled his or her own destiny in the context of the community by choosing to fashion a complete face and honest heart. “Making-face, making-heart” was the Nahuatl difrasismo for the social formation of persons.25 In Tenochtitlan, to educate meant to “give wisdom to the face”; it was a process that was always social in context and personal in scope.26 Because the idea of a solitary individual self was unintelligible, each person was defined as a function of the community. In this context, becoming human involved becoming socially fashioned as a part of a community with a past and a future—successful incorporation into the story of the community constituted the formation of a complete face and honest heart.

In the pre-Colombian world, the self—what modern society calls the personality—was represented as “face and heart,” ix-tli and yóllotl. Born without a face—that is, anonymous—each person required community formation. The most appropriate modern translation for face, ix-tli, is what today is referred to as the ego. In the Nahuatl speaking world ix-tli describes “the most individual characteristic of the human being—the very element which removed anonymity.”27 A proper face,

25 The language form used to impart the Nahuatl understanding of the inherent duality of the cosmos, a difrasismo, involves two conjoined words that create one idea or concept. The resulting meaning typically has no relation to the original two words. It was used to metaphorically describe a person, place, or concept.
26 León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture, 135.
27 León-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture, 113. See also Miguel León-Portilla, The Aztec Image of Self and Society: An Introduction to Nahua Culture (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992).
one that displayed a purposeful public appearance, was formed through proper training and education. The second element of the diffrasismo, the heart or yöllottl, is derived from the Nahuatl word for movement, ollin. Yöllottl symbolizes the unsettled element of dynamism found in the ego. This dynamism is the aspect of the personality that causes persons to search for wisdom through any number of activities. In the Cantares Mexicanos, the priests and philosophers repeatedly question the purpose of searching for truth on earth. The heart, created with an element of unsettled dynamism, remains restless until fulfilled by true wisdom.

What are you recalling? Where are your hearts? You scatter your heart, you carry it here and there, your heart is troubled on earth. Where can you be esteemed? Come return! Hear the good songs! Soften your heart with flower water. They're spreading fragrance. There! I, the singer, am lifting good songs, entertaining the Ever present, the Ever Near (in tloque in nahuaque).28

The heart, being dynamic, is troubled and pursues gratification by “scattering here and there” attempting to fill the perception of emptiness. In the Nahuatl-speaking world, flower and song were the diffrasismo for wisdom. Wisdom was attainable only by understanding poetry, the wisdom of the gods. Finding “flower water” in the context of “good songs” signifies attaining true wisdom—the same wisdom enjoyed by the creator, the lord of the near and the close, in tloque in nahuaque. Thus, a complete person was made up of an educated face whose heart’s natural inclination for searching had found refuge in the truth and wisdom found only through the creator. The process of becoming educated involved submitting to the traditions of the community and the will of the one who existed in tloque in nahuaque.

The philosophical and epistemological framework for education in central Mexico was based on a conception of the cosmos as an organic unity. As in most primary and residually oral cultures, understanding one’s place in the cosmos influenced one’s responsibility toward the cosmos. Philosophers imagined humanity engaged in an orderly, yet slippery, relationship with the creator and, by extension, with the entire cosmos. Preserving this relationship was considered essential to the maintenance of the universe; it demanded a moral code and a system of ethical behavior consistent with the regulations of the community and the life force of the cosmos. Guidelines for moral and ethical behavior were based upon a proper relationship with the cosmos. Morality

was thought to be that which maintained balance and did not offend the immediate world—it was unthinkable to speak an untruth in the face of the sun or the moon. Therefore, the Mexica developed great centers of learning and established compulsory education for all young people. In these centers of learning young people were taught ethical and moral behavior, the traditions of their culture and the proper rhetoric for engaging in public discourse. Often, responsibility took the form of sacrifice or offering that carried over into almost every category of life. The Mexica school system reflected this ethos and developed an institution with very strict rules, rules that demanded personal discipline and sacrifice. By teaching responsibility in their schools and indoctrinating their youth into the national ideology, the Mexica ensured the preservation of the cosmos.

The Mexica derived many of their philosophical categories from the Tolteca, the first of the Nahuatl-speaking people to reach central Mexico, who, in conjunction with all the Nahuatl-speaking people of Mesoamerica, socially constructed reality to conform to an ecological paradigm of a unified cosmos. Their notions of self and community were not idealized abstractions debated by theologians and philosophers. Rather, Nahuatl categories of being originated in and were grounded in an anthropology that understood the entire cosmos, including humanity, existing as an organic unity. These views were prominent in the region of central Mexico prior to the arrival of the Mexica in 1325. Tlacaelel, chief advisor to the kings of Tenochtitlan, constructed ideologies contrary to the cultural legacy of the Tolteca empires and specific to the Mexica in the fifteenth century. These creeds, labeled “martial mysticism” by León-Portilla, were centered on the omnipotence of the tribal deities Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca and their relationship to the people of Tenochtitlan. In his original manifestation Huitzilopochtli symbolized both the “regenerative power of the world of the spirit and the imperial power of the Aztec state.” Adherents of this dogma incorpor-

29León-Portilla, Aztec Image, 163. Tlacaelel, half-brother to Moctezuma I, was considered the power behind the chief rulers for several decades. He is credited with the creation of sacrificial ceremonies, the refining of the “flower wars,” and the increased ritual of sacrifice. León-Portilla argues that, in contrast to the militaristic Tlacaelel, the tlamatinime, the wise ones, “oriented their thinking along philosophical lines that yielded a different nature for the divine, with a less conflictive image of its relationship to humankind, a less aggressive image of human nature, a more ambivalent purpose for humanity’s existence, and some hope that an escape... was possible” (ibid).

rated *Mexica* tribal myths into the myths of the *Tolteca* in an attempt to persuade the people of the significance of their mission of empire building. Key to their strategy was the destruction of the ancient codices. The newly created myths and ideologies, replacing the old, glorified the dominance of the *Mexica* empire and established a need for human sacrifice to appease the gods. When this occurred, *Quetzalcoatl*, the peaceful god of *Tula*, was replaced by the warrior gods of the *Mexica* and set in an eternal conflict with these tribal deities.

The struggle between *Quetzalcoatl* and *Huitzilopochtli* reflected the inner struggle between the primacy of philosophy—flower and song—and the primacy of the militaristic leaders of state. Even the school system, becoming divided along class lines, reflected this conflict. The *Mexica* academy for the working classes, the *telpochcalli*, taught students the way of the warrior—upholding the principles of the “jaguar and the ocelot.” The nonmilitaristic *calmécac*, on the other hand, instructed the children of the nobility in the way of the priest and scholar—flower and song. Enmity between the groups was frequent. In folios 9 through 11 of the *Cantares Mexicanos* is preserved a dialogue that took place amongst the *Nahuatl*-speaking philosophers who lived within the boundaries of the triple alliance of *Tenochtitlan*, *Texcoco*, and *Tacuba* in late fifteenth-century central Mexico. Their purpose was to discuss the wisdom of their ancestors and to clarify the meaning of flower and song. In the end, the principles and ideas employed by the people in their everyday life, and those taught to the youth, reflected the beliefs consistent with the philosophy of flower and song rather than those promoted by *Tlacaelel*. In addition, the “invocations and discourses delivered as part of the life-cycle rites, such as during births, deaths, marriages, and even following the election of a ruler,” reflected beliefs consistent with the emphasis on flower and song.

Subsequently the *Mexica* system was replaced by the educational system of the Franciscans and other Christian missionaries. The underlying philosophical framework of the people did not change, however.

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31 Thankfully, Nezahualcoyotl, leader of *Texcoco*, part of the *Nahua* triple alliance, refused to destroy the codices and instead set out to glorify the ancient *Tolteca* philosophy and teachings.

32 Markman and Markman, *The Flayed God*, 207.
It continued to be grounded in a theological anthropology centered on the idea of duality (*Ometéotl*), an organic understanding of one's relationship to the community and cosmos (*tonal*), and constant movement (*ollin*). As the newly constituted hybrid Mesoamerican culture made the transition from one with an indigenous worldview into one that was outwardly European, its rituals and practices did not disappear, but were merely relegated to the periphery of civic life. Hidden within, however, was the wisdom of the ancestors. Concealed within a matrix that preserved the ancient understanding of the sacred and the profane, these rituals embodied the philosophical constructs of *Nahuatl* philosophy and religion. In this way, in private and out of sight of the priests and leaders, elements of the old culture were transmitted from one generation to the next. Transmission of this wisdom, and the identity it embraced, was conveyed predominately through the domains of popular wisdom, popular religion, and popular healing rituals, spheres of life and thought that were inextricably linked and intimately inseparable. These spheres became the locus of a new, hidden resistance, impenetrable by the conqueror. Fused with the religious beliefs and ways of life fashioned in ancient Mesoamerica, they comprised a sturdy matrix around which the culture was communicated. It was this matrix that was the basis for the resiliency of the people and culture.

*A Dual Creator, a Balanced Life*

The *Mexica* world has been described as one that is more oriented toward communication with the living, nonhuman world than the living, human world. To live in such a world was to live in a constant state of *nepantla*, caught in the spiritual void between two worlds—between and within the spirit world and the earthly world. Yet, the world was not a place to be rejected, nor was it a place from which humanity was to be detached. While the earth was thought to be a great monster that swallowed the sun each evening, threatening all life, the *Mexica* also knew that the earth sustained humanity by providing the food that sustained life. In the world of the *Mexica* the earth represented a nurturing mother and, simultaneously, a fearful, angry beast, both the womb and the tomb of all life. That the world was such a frightening place was a result of the *Mexica* understanding of creation and the role of humanity in sustaining that creation.

Their was a practical philosophy with implications for the *piplintzin*, the upper classes, as well as the *macehualtzin*, the common people—

literally, those who deserve. As grasped by the *Mexica*, humanity was created in a living, breathing world and placed in an orderly, yet slippery, relationship with the gods, the earth, and the cosmos. A balanced life demanded a moral code and an ethical behavior consistent with the regulations of the community and the life-giving force of the cosmos. Maintaining equilibrium between many multilayered relationships was essential for preserving the balance of the universe. Yet, morals and ethics epitomized a this-worldly orientation. In no way was justification for actions on earth concerned with the laws or decrees of a distanced and detached deity. The struggle for equilibrium, symmetry, and balance required that humans take seriously the concrete reality of evil as a necessary and essential part of creation. Consequently, *Mexica* parents instructed their children to take care on the road they were to follow.

Behold the road thou art to follow. . . . Take heed. On earth it is a time for care, it is a place for caution. Behold the word; heed and guard it, and with it take your way of life, your works. On earth we live, we travel along a mountain peak. Over here there is an abyss, over there is an abyss. If you go over here, or if you go over there, you will fall in. Only in the middle does one go, does one live.

These admonitions reveal that the *Nahuatl*-speaking people focused on preserving balance in their lives. From an ethical perspective, *Nahuatl* philosophical categories did not parallel categories of sin and evil as constructed by Christian theologians. Moral and ethical behavior was focused on concrete realities found in this world and was not concerned with such trivialities as salvation, an afterlife, or another world. As Jorge Klor de Alva makes clear, "Nahua religiosity, in contrast to the Christian focus on salvation, was fundamentally apotropaic, that is, centered on averting evil through appropriate observances." Keeping evil away from oneself and one's social relations was achieved through the proper performance of everyday rituals. Since all humanity was subject to the unpredictable, opposing forces of the cosmos,

### Notes


acquisition of proper knowledge regarding one's actions was essential. Knowledge of the things to be avoided and knowledge of the proper rituals necessary for gaining the favor of the gods sustained self and community. This, in turn, reckoned a person worthy of the blessings bestowed by the creator.³⁷

Philosophically, humanity was eternally connected to and intertwined with the universe. Humans formed a continuum with others and the world beyond. This continuum established a contiguity with others that was both physical and spiritual. A unified concept of the individual person, for which there existed no specific philosophical categories, converged into one category side-by-side with concepts of the relational or communal self and the corporeal body in Nahuatl thinking.³⁸ The ideology of “flower and song” and its underlying framework, the framework of the cosmos, was modeled after the Nahuatl conception of the sole creator god, Ometéotl, the embodiment of duality, often referred to in rhetoric and writing as “the lord of the near, the nigh.” To the Mexica, Ometéotl, ever omnipresent, became in iłoque in nahuaque, “Lord of the Close Vicinility,” the “Lord who is present and nigh,” or, more appropriate, “the one who is near to everything and to whom everything is near.”³⁹ This creator deity emanated from the upper heavens—the twelfth and thirteenth heavens—from Omecoyan, the source of duality. As a dual being, Ometéotl simultaneously existed as a male-female unity, separately as male and female, and independently as male or female. Thus, Ometéotl was the personification of three possibilities: a coeternal dual god-goddess, concurrently male and female, united as one with dual aspects; a god who existed distinctly as unique male and female entities eternally bound together; and simultaneously as a dual god-goddess, perpetually shifting back and forth between both aspects.

³⁷ Avoiding evil did not, however, guarantee eternal life in an ethereal, otherworldly place. Instead, the nature and manner of one’s death—not one’s moral conduct in life—determined one’s final destiny. León-Portilla, Aztec Thought, 127. See also Anderson and Dibble, Book 3, 41.


³⁹ Garibay, Historia de la Literatura Náhuatl, 408.
He is the Lord and Lady of our duality (Ometetl-Omechtli)
He is Lord and Lady of our maintenance (Tonacatecutli-Tonacalcatl)
He is the mother and father of the gods, the old god . . .
He is the star which illumines all things, and he is the Lady of the shining
skirt of stars
(Citallatonic-Citlanicue)
He is our mother, our father (in Tonan, in Tota)
Above all his is Ometéotl who dwells in the place of duality, Omecoyan.\(^\text{40}\)

This triumvirate of possibilities allowed Ometéotl to manifest him/herself in any number of ways at any given time and place. Depicting the Mexica as possessors of a pantheon of multifarious gods and goddesses is a misinterpretation of their understanding of the nature of in tloque in nahuauque. In Nahua thinking the ontological nature of in tloque in nahuauque allowed for multiple manifestations, temporal and spatial, as well as a coexistent embodiment of complex essences—all of them constituting the basic substance and nature of Ometéotl. This vision of multiplicity and duality was not understood in the modern sense, as an analytical duality with no synthesis, but as a vibrant dialectical existence. Sylvia Marcos describes this state of affairs as “a state of extreme dynamic tension, such as when two forces meet without resolution and veer precariously toward the edge of chaos.”\(^\text{41}\) Here, the simultaneous existence of two or more opposites—or the permanent shifting from one pole to the other—was not considered impossible. Furthermore, to envision Ometéotl as a detached creator or as one who was simply incarnate as the creative impulse of the cosmos was a misinterpretation of the nature of Ometéotl. As creator, Ometéotl embodied the entire cosmos, although in dual and multiple manifestations. All that existed originated in and derived its nature from Ometéotl. Life and death; the earth and heavens, both the upper world and the underworld(s); the sun and the moon; good and evil; dark and light; day and night; and man and woman were all believed to be dual aspects of Ometéotl. The revelation of these multiple manifestations occurred at any time, in one location or many. Moreover, it was not unheard of for Ometéotl to become manifest as two completely different representations simultaneously.

This multiple view of the nature and existence of the creator, indeed of the entire cosmos, shaped the Nahuatl perception of humanity and the understanding of humanity’s relationship to the world. The entire cosmos, including humanity, was recognized and defined as a

\(^{40}\) León-Portilla, Aztec Thought, 90.

\(^{41}\) Sylvia Marcos, personal communication, Claremont, California. This understanding of the cosmos engendered a necessity for balance in the Nahuatl mind. Marcos describes such a balance as “equilibrium in motion.”
unity of complementary opposites struggling for fluid equilibrium, symmetry, and balance. Because the creator existed as the one and the many, humans must also be constituted in their humanity as a whole—as a community. Because the godhead was conceived of as plural, all reality must be construed as pluralistic, continuously reshuffling and reconnecting to multiple links that extend throughout the universe. Furthermore, because the cosmos was inherently infused with the life force *ollin*, permanent movement was the nature of the universe. Nothing was able to exist in a static state—the nature of the cosmos demanded movement—therefore, the godhead too must change. A static, unchanging god was not considered the philosophical ideal. This fundamental understanding of *Ometéotl* formed the basis for the Mesoamerican conception of humanity and the ethical and moral system that motivated their every action. The purpose of life on earth was to discover the truth and to follow the path demanded by the one who existed in *tloque in nahuaque*.

In their dynamic world, the entire cosmos functioned as a means of integrating the spiritual and physical aspects of life. The landscape was a living, breathing reminder that the multiple manifestations of the one who existed in *tloque in nahuaque* were alive, animated, and involved with the community. Humanity, contiguous with the nearby environment—and by association, contiguous with the spirit world—was responsible for the maintenance of the immediate physical world, as well as the spirit world represented by the gods of the fifth sun. The world inhabited by the gods, together with the world occupied by the nearby landscape, fashioned a living, breathing cosmos whereby spirit and landscape entered into a parallel relationship with the community. Bound to space and time, religious and spiritual development and the formation of persons took the form of a developing earth ethic.

By conceptually holding together the contrasting worlds represented by the physical and spiritual forces of the cosmos, *Nahuatl* philosophy was able to avoid the dichotomy between body and spirit that exists today in many Western philosophies. Understanding the facility with which the *Nahuatl*-speaking people harmonized these two apparently incongruent concepts is the key to understanding their philosophy of humanity and community. It also provides Chicano/a theology—and all theology and pedagogy grounded in indigenous epistemology—with a means of avoiding the problematic of deducing "an idea of struggle from an a priori aesthetics."42 Indeed, theology constructed

from indigenous categories cannot distance itself from the everyday struggle of the community even while it affirms the everyday aesthetic of the cosmos.

Critical pedagogy, which emanates from the Hegelian tradition, struggles with the urgency of creating a synthesis between two apparently contradictory poles to negate the negative.\textsuperscript{43} Such a Western-based, dialectical duality is not analogous to the indigenous understanding of duality as the fundamental, driving force of the cosmos. In the context of Western philosophy, there remains a desire to resolve tension and construct multiple syntheses, even if at some point in the future a synthesis becomes an antithesis. In Mesoamerica, duality was always a struggle between opposing, complementary forces. Thus, day and night, sun and moon, and man and woman were all necessary components of a complete world. \textit{Nahuatl} philosophy was concerned with maintaining a balance between these forces; it was never intended that the struggle would eradicate one end of the pole in favor of the other. To negate one or the other would throw the cosmos into chaos.

\textit{Perichoresis-Community as the Basis for Sociality}

An interpretation of sociality based upon perichoresis-community is one way of integrating the \textit{Nahuatl} understanding of the Creator's role in the cosmos with the panentheistic vision of the cosmos advocated by Jürgen Moltmann. This vision conceives of humanity in fellowship with humanity, with God, and with all creation. A \textit{Nahuatl} perspective also affirms Dietrich Bonhoeffer's portrayal of relationships and communities as the fundamental social elements of a society. Collectively, Bonhoeffer, Moltmann, and Leonardo Boff offer a practical means of reformulating a social doctrine of the godhead that is ultimately compatible with the \textit{Mexica} view of humanity. They also provide a means of connecting the contrasting worlds of ancient Mesoamerica and modern Christian theology.

Combining a perichoresis-community model of the godhead with the \textit{Nahuatl} realization that the spirit of the one who exists in \textit{tloque in nahuague} is the vivifying force of the cosmos leads to the development of an indigenous theological anthropology of sociality. The perichoretic concept of interpermeation and eternal movement one around the other is analogous to the \textit{Nahuatl} concept of \textit{ollin}, or movement. López

\footnote{43}{For an excellent description of dialectical pedagogy see Moacir Gadotti, \textit{Pedagogy of Praxis: A Dialectical Philosophy of Education} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).}
Austin explains that the animistic entity *teyolia* is derived from the words *ollin*, movement; *yol*, life; *yollo*, heart; and *olol*, roundness.\(^4^4\) Philologically, the qualities of vitality, knowledge, tendency or inclination, and affection can be attributed to *yollo* and by extension to *ollin*. *Ollin* is the dynamism that drives all living beings—to lose *ollin* is to cease to exist. In the indigenous cultures of America and ancient Mesoamerica, there was an appreciation for the dynamic and living relationship that existed between the human spirit and the life force of the universe, understood as *ollin*, resonance or vibration.\(^4^5\) The central belief was that the universe was and must continue to be in constant flux and motion. Understood in this way, motion, resonance, and vibration permeate all creation, including the godhead, hold all being together—albeit in a fluid and tumultuous way—and allow humanity a purposeful role in creation. Hence, as in the primordial creation story, the world could not endure if the sun did not continue its path in the heavens. As a fundamental source of power and animation, *ollin* flows through all living organisms, including humanity, and connects the multiple underworlds with this world and the heavens. Energy flows up out of the earth, in the form of *malinalli*, spiraling toward the heavens. Ever moving, energy, comprehended as resonance and vibration, is at once a source of fear and of enchantment.

**The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology**

The relationship between the Christian understanding of Holy Spirit, the Hebrew concept of *Shekinah*, and the *Nahuatl* understanding of *ollin* is one that has implications for greater awareness of indigenous spirituality. Although the medieval theologians who spiritually conquered the Americas found no concept in *Nahuatl* philosophical categories that corresponded to their understanding of the Holy Spirit, I am intrigued by the possibility that the Christian understanding of Spirit, especially as formulated by Boff and Moltmann, parallels the *Nahuatl* philosophical concept of *ollin*. Here, the Holy Spirit and *ollin* are seen as the *power of the new* and of *renewal* in all creation. Understood this way, it follows that revelation of the godhead is possible only through the renewed creation represented by humanity in community.

In Christian theology, the relationship between the Creator and the Redeemer is complemented by the third person, the bridge that integrates all, the Spirit—the sustainer and giver of life. The Spirit is “the

\(^{44}\)López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 1:211f. When the *teyolia* leaves the body a person dies.

principle of union, communion, and reconciliation of all persons with others and with God.”

The Spirit is the glorifying God. The Spirit is the unifying God. In this respect the Spirit is not an energy proceeding from the Father or from the Son; it is a subject from whose activity the Son and the Father receive their glory and their union . . . The Holy Spirit means the subject who glorifies the Father and the Son, and unites the Father and the Son.\(^\text{47}\)

Likewise, through the work of the Spirit, humanity is connected as beings-in-relationship. The goal and mission of the triune God—in Godself and in human history—is to bring all creation into communion through the mediation of the Son and the life giving, driving force of the Holy Spirit. This is done in fulfillment of the promise that all humanity should conform to and possess “the image of God,” the image of beings-in-relationship. It is the Spirit that integrates, liberates, and infuses life into relationships, allowing humans to develop into beings-in-relationship. With the life the Spirit infuses into it, a community becomes a living, breathing organism; a unity created from the many. The perichoretic at-oneness of the triune God is comparable to and corresponds with the experience of the human community mediated by the godhead. The mediated community is the community united by the Spirit through infusion of respect, affection, and love.\(^\text{48}\) In Boff’s view there is no person or society that can organize life without “cultivating the inner regions (the Spirit) where creativity comes from and where the dreams that can transform history are worked out.”\(^\text{49}\)

The Shekinah as Spirit

The idea of the Shekinah developed out of cultic language and originally referred to God’s “tabernacle,” tent, or God’s “dwelling place” among the people. In early rabbinic literature, “Holy Spirit” was not a term for God; rather, it referred to the “spirit of the sanctuary,” the “medium of revelation and a qualification for a sanctified ministry.”\(^\text{50}\)

As a cultic construction, it is consistent with the Nahuatl understanding


\(^\text{48}\) Ibid., 157.


of an immanent Creator, one who is both near and close, one who dwells alongside and among the community. In this context, the Shekinah is not a divine attribute; it is the presence of Godself at a particular place and at a particular time. In Israel, Shekinah referred to the settling of God in and suffering with the community at one specific place and era of humanity in history.

The idea of the Shekinah includes these three aspects: the present indwelling of the Lord in Israel; the form assumed by the condescension of the Eternal One; and the anticipations of the glory of the One who is to come. Through his Shekinah God is present in Israel. Together with Israel he suffers persecutions. Together with Israel he goes into exile as a prisoner.

Today it is understood that the Spirit of the Creator is the life force of all created beings and the provider of the living space where they can grow and develop their potentialities. It is recognized that the Spirit is sent to all places at all times. Present in the whole of humanity, it works in everyone, of whatever culture or religion. It “dwell in multiplicity, takes on diversity, creating a movement of communion and convergence from within the immensity of human diversity.” The life force of the Spirit is the life force that made possible the resurrection of Christ and which is now “poured out on all flesh” in order to make it eternally alive and eternally new. In making all things eternally new, the influence of the Spirit in the world is creative and oriented toward the eschatological culmination of history. In this sense, the Spirit is primarily action and transformation, hence the connection with the Nahuatl concept of ollin. With respect to human community, the Spirit’s mission is the transformation and bringing of persons into conformity with the imago Dei by liberating them from the oppression brought about by social structures and persons that would distort their humanity. Likewise, the power of ollin is the power that heals broken humanity, empowering persons to be incorporated into the community where they are now free as beings-in-relationship.

A Theological Anthropology

Refashioning a theological anthropology of sociality from the perspective of the Nahuatl-speaking people is essential for the construction

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51 Ibid., 48.
52 Moltmann, Trinity and the Kingdom, 28 (emphasis in original).
53 Moltmann, Spirit of Life, 84.
of pedagogy specific to the community represented by modern day descendants of the people of ancient Mesoamerica. This reinterpretation provides the framework for further reconstructive work toward a holistic ecology of indigenous education. In Christian theology, human—being before the godhead—is ultimately and intimately grounded in the nature of humanity. Theologically, personhood is anchored in the Creator’s right or claim on all humanity as human beings. This claim is a by-product of the creation of humanity “in God’s image” (Gen 1:26f. NRSV). Created “in God’s image” suggests more than being like God; rather it suggests being based upon God. In both the Christian and Nahuatl theology, humanity is not created to be like the Creator; humanity is created with the intention that each human base their entire being upon the creator, to be in correspondence with the image of the one who exists in tloque in nahuauque.

Furthermore, the “image of God” is not a quality or a concept of being, but is concretely observed in history as being in relationship, a relationship not only to God, but also to all three spheres of ecology: God, self, and the world. To the degree that humans stand in this relationship they bear the image of God. This is because the image of God must always be experienced as a complementary differentiation of being. Being-based-upon-God can never be other than being-for-the-other person, or true correspondence. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated in his passage on Genesis 1:26: “Man is free by the fact that creature is related to creature. Man is not alone, he is in duality and it is in duality and is in this dependence on the other that his creatureliness consists.” For Bonhoeffer, the “I-thou” person in community is the only person possible. A solitary person cannot bear the image and likeness of God. If the act of being created in the image and likeness of God establishes an inviolability of the person, that image is concretely expressed in living out human relationships—in being with and for the “other-as-subject” in a relationship of parity and reciprocity.

In the Nahuatl-speaking world, to be human was to be macehuale—deserved by penitence—and subject to the original creative sacrifice of

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55 See Gen 1:26f.; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3.9.
56 The image of God is a gift or endowment that takes place in the concrete and particular existence of each person. Therefore the so-called right to life is qualified by this gift of life. See Ray S. Anderson, On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982) 71.
57 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall; Temptation: Two Biblical Studies (New York: MacMillan, 1958) 38. Bonhoeffer was here speaking of the male-female duality as the “image of God”; in other places he expands this to include all humankind. See also The Communion of Saints: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), where Bonhoeffer proclaims that Christ exists as a community of persons.
the gods for the benefit of humanity. Understood in this way, humanity was bound forever to repay the initial sacrifice of the gods with a similar sacrifice in order to assure the continuation of the cosmos. Responsibility for the maintenance of the spiritual and physical worlds permeated Mexica thinking. When obscured by the Mexica state ideology that promoted martial mysticism, this cosmic responsibility generated sacrificial rituals appalling to the modern mind. The original understanding of humanity's indebtedness to the Creator, as transmitted by the Tolteca, emphasized the formation of humanity via ritual discipline, sacrifice and knowledge of flor y canto. Taking place in the presence of the ever-present Creator, formation of personhood was an expected byproduct of creation. The conformity of one's heart to the will of the one who exists in tloque in nahuaque was the goal of "making-face, making-heart." Furthermore, this process was possible only in the context of a community of similarly formed persons, each with the goal of knowing the will of the one who exists in tloque in nahuaque.

A Model of Effective Education

Educational practices in the United States must be revised if they are to be effective in empowering Chicano/a or immigrant populations. Too often, educational practices reflect, at best, the view of traditional pedagogy, namely, pedagogy that upholds formation of individual identity and conscience as a priority. This creates a situation whereby ways of living, learning, and being are separated from the lives of the people who most seek and need inclusion—immigrants and their children. One result of this pedagogical approach is "the destruction of the inner sense of solidarity characteristic of popular Hispanic cultures." Another result of this universalizing approach is that it furthers the assimilation of the Chicano/a or immigrant to popular American urban middle-class culture, a process that often moves people away from the truth instead of toward it. I suggest an alternative method of educating Chicanos/as, recent immigrants, and the children of immigrants.

I begin my model with a story, a story passed on to me by my family. It is a story steeped in strength and filled with the powerful vision of a man who lived expressly for his community and family.

In 1903 a number of natural disasters made life on the Arizona-New Mexico border difficult for a man with a large family to raise. Francisco

58 León-Portilla explains that humans appear as the result of Quetzalcoatl's penitence. Hence, humans were called macehuales, "those deserved by penitence," León-Portilla, Aztec Image, 8.
59 Deck, Second Wave, 117.
and his wife Dolores had six young children to feed and rich, fertile land
to tend to. The long and seemingly endless drought forced many neigh-
bor and good friends to move further west or higher up the mountains
to who knows where. Water was scarce and good friends were becoming
scarcer. To make matters worse a brutal disease plagued the small com-

unity and killed off many of the elderly and young children. Unfortu-
nately, two Martinez children were afflicted and died during the outbreak.

As a young man Francisco Pabon left his community, took his mother's
surname (Martinez) and crossed the Rio Bravo del Norte to begin a new
life in El Norte. He found a good job, albeit a very dangerous one due to
the invasion by the U.S. of Indian land, carrying supplies between El
Paso and Albuquerque via wagon. It was on one of those trips, in 1885,
while passing through the county seat in Mesilla, that he met his wife-to-
be. After settling down a few years in Las Cruces, Francisco decided to
follow the mines. He and his family headed West toward Silver City and
the mountainous region of the Gila wilderness. As the mines ran low and
the population edged westward, the Martinez family followed—to
Lordsburg, Duncan, San Antonio, Clifton, Metcalf, Morenci, and eventually Los Angeles.

Francisco was a man respected for the wisdom and knowledge he
possessed—learned, he claims, as a young boy listening to the elders of
his community. He valued these lessons immensely and saw to it that he
passed on his knowledge and wisdom to his children. Still, and he knew
this to be true too, they learned more from his actions than from his
words. It was during this year that Francisco showed his family and
small town the true value of his wisdom. Because the drought had been
long, many of the rickety houses in the community were built too close to
the banks of a perpetually dry river; some were built in the riverbed it-
self. One early morning of a particularly warm summer day, off in the
high mountains to the north, Francisco sensed something peculiar. He
had learned to resonate with and "read" the earth's messages as a child—
of course this was an important skill to know, the gods lived in the
mountains and by "reading" them one would know what the gods had
in store for the community. He listened, concentrating long and hard be-
fore discerning the wonderful, horrible truth—rain, angry and powerful,
was on its way . . . fast. He summoned his neighbors and reported the
news. The residents of the small town, whose hopes had been dashed
many times before, told Francisco to go back to work. They felt comfort-
able that rain was far in the future—besides it wasn't yet the rainy sea-
son. But Francisco, a stubborn man, was as certain about this as he ever
was about anything. Moving quickly he rounded up his young children.
They collected as much strong, thick rope as possible, tied one end to the
largest trees they could find and the other end they tied around their
house, fastening it securely. After anchoring their house with three
sturdy ropes, the rain began—strong monsoons, the kind that soak a per-
son to the skin in a matter of seconds—and wind that forced them to
hold on to each other tight for support. Their feet were quickly mired in
mud as they set out to secure as many houses as possible. By the end of the day only two houses remained standing. It was in these two houses that the entire community sought shelter until the town was rebuilt.

This story is offered as a model of education for leadership and liberation. The knowledge and intuitive wisdom mastered by my great-grandfather is not found in books or learned at school. His mind was shaped and his wisdom nurtured at the feet of the elders of his community—the wise men and women who were in touch with and whose lives resonated with the voices of the spirits of god. Yet, if we define education as the process of “sharing content with people in the context of their community and society,” his was a genuine education, an education similar in many ways to Mary Elizabeth Moore’s “traditioning” education. “Traditioning” education is a transformational education grounded in a remembering of the historical traditions of the past with the hope of transformation of the future. Indispensable to this model is the priority of poiesis—acting on the knowledge one receives. Failure to act renders one’s knowledge useless. Finally, this action is undertaken for the benefit of a self in the context of a community. In this sense it is emancipatory and can be construed as an emancipatory


61 Mary Elizabeth Moore, Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983) 121. Traditioning education “is understood as a process by which the historical tradition is remembered and transformed as the Christian community encounters God and the world in present experience and as that community is motivated toward the future.” Accumulating wisdom, “the ongoing tradition, past, present and future; the accumulating experience; and a wisdom that grows out of the community’s experience in the world,” is essential (176).

62 Thomas H. Groome, Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, The Way of Shared Praxis (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991) 44f. Groome reconstructs poiesis beyond Aristotle’s understanding of it as an “intelligent way of life and knowing that is productive and creative.” He suggests that poiesis is human action that includes “all the creative, imaginative, and life-giving work of all humankind.” This differs from Clodovis Boff’s understanding of poiesis as merely a “transitive activity, whose finality is something other than itself,” Clodovis Boff, Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987) 331. I intend to develop Groome’s grasp of poiesis in the direction of emancipatory poiesis and then to integrate the understanding of emancipatory poiesis with an indigenous understanding of the dynamic and living relationship that exists between the human spirit and the universe—a vivifying element understood as ollin, resonance or vibration. It is the real-life imaginative power of emancipatory poies, when grasped in the context of the teaching-learning situation, that will free mestizo/a immigrants and their children from the rigid and fixed thinking found in the school systems they encounter in the United States.
poiesis. These factors—a traditioning wisdom poetically put into action for the emancipation and benefit of the community—are the foundation of a model of education functioning out of an indigenous framework.

An a priori necessity for this model of education is the existence of a community of ontic beings committed to nurturing relationships within their community and the cosmos. These people reveal their commitment to one another through a series of actions taken on behalf of the world. In a society that acknowledges the reality that humanity at its ontological core is a connected community of ontic selves, what emerges is true ontic conation, that is, a community of real beings acting purposively for one another in history.63 Furthermore, a relationship in balance with the earth/soil/cosmos presupposes that as humans we have the ability to perceive the communication and movements of the earth and resonate with them. Such attunement to the earth’s vibrations involves the entire body-self: the senses, the emotions, and the sensual and conceptual capacities. To embrace this concept is to understand the cosmos as not simply a mass of inanimate matter, but to acknowledge the ever-present spirit of life, ollin, resonating with and through all matter, interconnecting humanity with nonhumanity; past with present and future; and all persons with the continuing presence of their ancestors.

The Mandate for an Indigenous Pedagogy

An effective model of education for immigrants and Chicanos/as is one that integrates the main ideas of a critical pedagogy with the pedagogical assumptions of the ancient Mesoamericans. The first step in creating this community-based curriculum requires that educators be mentally decolonized and actively involved in the daily life of the community.64 I will briefly describe curriculum that was constructed specifically for and with immigrants living in Los Angeles County. The program—Civics Education Building Effective Communities (CEBEC)—was sponsored and implemented by Cerritos Community College.

Beginning February 2001, the CEBEC program presented to participants in the Los Angeles County cities of Artesia, Norwalk, Bellflower,

63Groome defines conation as “the conscious drive to perform volitional acts. This implies consciousness, desire, will and action.” Groome, Sharing Faith, 27.

64Mental decolonization is the term Frederique Apffel Marglin uses to describe the auto-critique necessary for those whose acquired knowledge is grounded in the modern Western world. Anchored in indigenous cultures, he concludes that, “no cultural affirmation can take place without simultaneously engaging in a process of mental decolonization.” Cited in Madhu Suri Prakash and Gustavo Esteva, Escaping Education: Living as Learning within Grassroots Cultures (New York: Peter Lang, 1998) 75.
and Cerritos. Workshops were designed to address the generative themes and codes that emerged during the ethogenic analysis conducted above. Workshops dealing with issues such as Self-Esteem, Becoming an Effective Citizen, Civics Participation in the Local Community, Immigrants in the Workplace, Financial Planning, Building Effective Communities, and Family Literacy were presented. Participants were predominantly Spanish-speaking immigrants from Mexico. Groups ranged in size from six to thirty-five participants. A minimum of two facilitators led each group. Participants adapted to the methodology without difficulty and actively contributed to the learning process. Storytelling, drawing, writing, singing, and dance were accepted and utilized as part of the teaching and learning experience. Creating a common story enabled participants to communicate with and connect with community members and members of their families. In many instances, the renewed sense of community resulted in workshops ending later than planned. In the end, the process of active reflection and synthesis was the component of the process most difficult to achieve. This was true especially in the workshops conducted for Spanish-speaking participants. Here, participants were eager to participate in activities; however, at the point where reflection and synthesis were to occur, the group became energized and insisted upon engaging in immediate action in conjunction with the program. As a result, each participant has become more actively involved in the community as an agent for social change.

Areas for Future Activities

Success with these workshops convinces me that now is the time to create a school based upon the pedagogy of the Nahuatl-speaking people of ancient Mesoamerica. The purpose of the school would be two-fold. First and foremost, the future of mestizo/a immigrants in America demands a school system that fashions and nurtures the construction of a multiple identity. Second, the preservation and transmission of the ancient Nahuatl culture and philosophy is essential. The philosophy and way of life of the Nahuatl-speaking people of ancient Mesoamerica is permeated with truths and realities missing from the mind frame of first world cultures. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated above, it is a philosophy and way of life still practiced in many small ways by the descendants of the Mexica.

In this school, fields of study would embody the curricula of the calmécac, cuicacalli, and telpochcalli. For instance, students would study and learn to interpret the philosophy, worldview, and religious beliefs of the Nahuatl-speaking people through indigenous eyes. This would be
achieved through the process of song, dance, and theater, as well as through learning the rhetoric and sayings found in the ancient codices. Accessing the oral traditions is essential. Students would study math and astronomy utilizing indigenous methods. The history of the Mexica, including the importance of the ancient laws, and the true history of the invasion of the Americas would be evaluated. Nutrition and medical practices would be emphasized, including the significance of food in the ancient rituals. Finally, students will be encouraged to connect their experiences in the school with indigenous people worldwide.

Conclusion

Successful education of the local immigrant community in southern California is essential for the salvation of a generation of young people who struggle to live in a world they hardly understand. A paradigm of liberating education derived from the categories of thought found in the modern-day descendants of the Nahuatl-speaking people of ancient Mesoamerica is a necessity. Furthermore, this model can be used to fashion a program that will systematically educate all mestizos/as. Whether this program becomes a part of the public school system or offers a parallel education is not important. What is significant is that this spirit-based, holistic education be specifically constructed for the community of mestizo/a immigrants and their children. This task requires educators to be grounded in the philosophy, the worldview, and the "forward march of the people." This is not an easy task. However, it is a task that cries out for practical, competent people. It is my conviction that the historical starting point for the successful education of the community, the teaching of the values and ideals of the culture, and for reflection on this education and teaching is to be found in the poësis, imagination, and experience that comes from the Spirit-ollin. This is the same resonating Spirit that the tlamatinime of ancient Mesoamerica identified as ollin, the same principle that infused life into the communities of the Nahuatl-speaking people and allowed their cultural religiosity to persist and flourish in the midst of hopelessness and despair. The same Spirit that beckons us to take seriously the signs, visions, and sense of communion with the transcendent felt so deeply within the modern-day descendants of the Mexica. Finally, it is the same Spirit that begs the dominant culture to allow indigenous people to restore the loss of memory suffered at the hands of a vicious conqueror.

65 See Cajete, Look to the Mountain, for a description of indigenous ways of teaching science and math.